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*From the Baltimore Sun*

## **Franchot fighting slots**

### **Comptroller hopeful vows battle 'until the last dog dies'**

By Michael Dresser  
sun reporter

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Democrat Peter Franchot pledged yesterday that, if elected state comptroller, he would fight legalization of slot machines in Maryland "until the last dog dies" -- no matter who is elected governor.

Franchot slammed the other two Democrats in the race, Comptroller William Donald Schaefer and Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens, as "cheerleaders" for Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s proposals to bring slot machines to Maryland racetracks.

While the comptroller does not have a direct role in setting state policy on gambling, Franchot pledged to use the "bully pulpit" of the Board of Public Works to make the case that slot machines would do more harm than good to the state economy.

"Slots will bring addiction, broken families, crime and corruption to our communities," said Franchot, a state delegate from Montgomery County.

With Ehrlich and Mayor Martin O'Malley on the record in favor of slots, the issue has received little attention in the gubernatorial campaign. But Franchot seized on Ehrlich's prediction over the weekend that slots legislation would be approved next year if he is re-elected to spotlight the issue in the comptroller's race.

A former supporter of slot machine gambling, Franchot emerged as an outspoken opponent after Ehrlich was elected governor in 2002. Franchot organized protests and reached out to religious leaders opposed to gambling.

Franchot said he would oppose slots "as a matter of principle" even if O'Malley were elected governor. O'Malley has said he could support slots at racetracks in jurisdictions that would accept them, but he has not made the issue a centerpiece of his campaign.

"I'm a friend of O'Malley, and I will do everything I can to elect Martin O'Malley. But he has a position on slots I disagree with," Franchot said. He added that he doesn't believe the mayor is nearly as "obsessed with the issue" as Ehrlich.

Franchot's salvo on the slots issue is one of several issues on which he has taken a broad view of the role of the comptroller -- a post that traditionally had been defined more narrowly as the state's chief tax collector and financial watchdog. Franchot has proposed expansions of the state's spending on school construction and women's reproductive health, matters typically regarded as the business of the governor and General Assembly.

Owens said yesterday that slot machine gambling "is not a comptroller's issue" and that Franchot is "running for the wrong job." She dismissed the idea of using the comptroller's position on the Board of Public Works as a platform to oppose slots. "One of the reasons I'm running is to bring some dignity back to the Board of Public Works. Good heavens," she said.

Owens also accused Franchot of distorting her position on gambling.

"I have never been pro-slots," she said, contending that her role during the debates over slots was to make sure her county -- home to Laurel Park -- received its fair share of the revenues to offset the increased cost of police, fire and roads.

Laslo Boyd, a spokesman for the Schaefer campaign, also took issue with Franchot's emphasis on the slots issue.

"Peter has talked more about gubernatorial policy issues than the responsibilities of the comptroller," Boyd said. He said the characterization of Schaefer as a "cheerleader" for slots or "ally" of Ehrlich was a "misrepresentation of his position."

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Boyd said Schaefer looks at slots as "a source of revenue he could accept."

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